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SUBJECT: NOISE ON HUMANITARIAN ACCORD MASKS LACK OF PROGRESS

Summary

¶1. President Uribe authorized representatives of families of FARC hostages to seek direct meetings with the terrorist group and work towards an exchange of FARC hostages for imprisoned terrorists. Representatives of the families, including the mother of Ingrid Betancourt, blamed the FARC for their loved ones' captivity but said Uribe should do more to free them. In an interview with a French newspaper, Uribe outlined why the FARC's professed interest in an humanitarian accord was not sincere and reiterated his commitment to fighting them. End summary.

Uribe Authorizes Families to Seek FARC Contact

¶2. On February 24, the presidency issued a statement authorizing families of FARC hostages to seek direct meetings with the terrorist group to facilitate an "humanitarian accord." The statement said the GOC was amenable to contact with the FARC and authorized hostage family spokesperson Lucy de Gechen, wife of FARC hostage and Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechen, to contact the group. The statement followed Uribe's February 22 declaration that the GOC would intensify the fight against the FARC because it had rejected Uribe's most recent outreach effort, threatening rather than cooperating with Uribe's (unnamed) emissary.

Families Worry About Rhetoric

¶3. Yolando Pulecio, mother of FARC hostage and former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, criticized the FARC and Uribe on February 23, the occasion of Betancourt's 5th anniversary of captivity. She recognized the FARC's responsibility for taking her daughter hostage, but said Uribe had not done enough to free her, points echoed by Betancourt's two children, who now live in France. Claudia Rujeles, wife of FARC hostage and former Meta governor Alan Jara, said the FARC was intransigent, but urged Uribe to overcome obstacles to an exchange of hostages for imprisoned FARC terrorists. A number of hostage family representatives criticized the rhetoric used by all sides, calling for concrete steps to free their loved ones.

Uribe Outlines Obstacles to Accord

¶4. In an interview with French newspaper Le Figaro, published on the presidency website on February 21, Uribe said he was ready to meet with the FARC anywhere to discuss an humanitarian accord, but saw three obstacles. First, the FARC was not serious about the accord. It had continually mislead interlocutors and had demonstrated no interest in serious talks. Second, Uribe said the terrorist group had refused to accept a December 2005 European proposal for a 200km security zone to discuss an exchange, free of all armed actors, including GOC and FARC forces. Uribe repeated the GOC would not accept a "demilitarized zone" that allowed FARC terrorists to operate freely, a concession the FARC had seriously abused during the presidency of Andres Pastrana. Third, Uribe pointed out the FARC had refused to agree that FARC terrorists released from jail enter GOC reintegration programs or go into exile rather than return to FARC ranks.

¶5. Uribe insisted the GOC would continue to make every effort to secure the hostages' release, either through an humanitarian accord or through rescue efforts, if warranted.

Comment

¶6. The current flurry of comments surrounding an humanitarian accord stems from the fifth anniversary of Betancourt's seizure by the FARC, and does not represent any real movement by the GOC or the FARC on the issue.

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